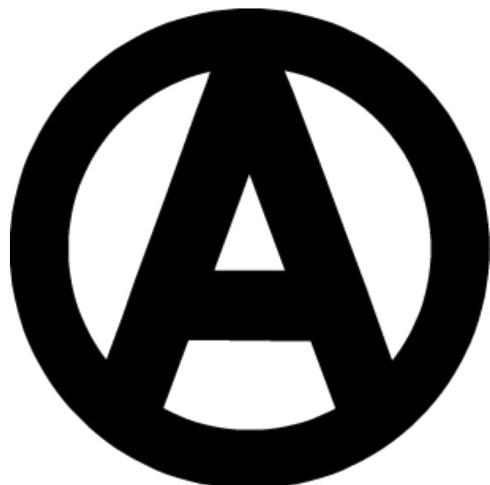


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RENT

An Injustice

I. R. Ybarra



An Invitation to Revolt...

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"What does 'within reason' mean? Is it specified by law?"

"No, it's whatever the judge says it is."

"Then it could be thousands, couldn't it?"

"Probably not. I don't think the judge..."

The ex-tenant dropped the suit.

Renting, the collection of rents, and the relation of landlords and tenants are, respectively, among the most humiliating, vicious and deplorable interactions that the human race, to its sorrow, has devised. Landlordism provokes unhappiness everywhere, and yet this shameful abuse pervades society unabated. It is worthwhile to examine first, before undertaking the abbreviated economic analysis which I will offer, the purely psychological, moral, and physical degradations which are thrust upon both parties to these execrable transactions. With a view toward demolishing the feeble defenses which the apologists for landlordism usually offer, I intend to show that this practice not only adds to the unwanted, harrowing authoritarianism that pesters our society, but it promotes also ugliness, sloth, and despair.

Let us begin by examining the nature of the relationship that exists between tenant and property-lord. Obviously this is an unequal sort of dealing, because one of the parties is in complete control, while the other has virtually no power whatsoever. Landlords can and do set the conditions by which tenants abide, while tenants are in most cases not free, practically speaking, to quibble with the terms these authoritarians promulgate. Arbitrary conditions, the essence of snooping busybodism, are listed or declaimed with a smug satisfaction that only the mentally emaciated can aspire to. Dozens of useless admonitions, comical were they not intended seriously to be obeyed, assail the would-be occupant of a simple dwelling. Woe to him who does not heed these silly regulations of fat, slatternly old men and women; his "deposit" will then be forfeit surely (as if it weren't in serious jeopardy anyway), and he can count himself lucky who escapes without at least a rent rise, or worse, a forcible subjection to the inconvenience of a sudden move.

For the tenant, or prospective tenant, all this forms the basis of an enduringly nasty realization that strident, boorish arrogance exerts a significant influence which, though he despises it, he is compelled to heed. The freedom-destroying and humiliating nature of this one-sided dealing is plain. The prospective tenant is moved by considerations of where he must live, the money he can spend, and limits on his available time to search for an acceptable "home". The landlord is complacent and uncaring about any such problems. The landlord can demand impossible terms, and will do so - first and last months' rent in advance, plus considerable deposits, in the certain knowledge that somewhere, someone will be able to afford his terms.

That this should lead to indolence, and consequently to stupidity, on the part of the landlords, is not difficult to apprehend. For the landlord, all health striving has now ceased; like a sluggish python digesting a deer, the propertied class swells and snores, its pudgy thumbs hooked in rolls of foul-smelling, unwashed fat. Unearned incomes breed complacency; complacency breeds mental stultification, and this last evokes greed for... more unearned income.

With the passing years, accumulated dissipated moments and a lifetime of pure greed crystallise upon the leering, ignorantly chuckling faces of these parasitical, meddling robbers. Meanwhile, the victims upon which these vampires slake their thirst, struggle and worry month after month, year after year, to meet the exorbitant demands for ever-increasing, taxing, killing payments. Nor do these awesome expenditures even guarantee that a person will have a HOME, since the tenants' privacy is no right which the landlord is bound to respect. Monthly, weekly, or even oftener "inspections" are commonplace, wherewith the

signature on the rental agreement, tenants have no idea what his last name is.

Chip becomes very abusive to renters, often presenting them with massive rent-hikes if all else fails to make them move. He NEVER gives back deposits when the tenants leave, always finding some technicality to justify keeping the money.

One former tenant, in an effort to recover \$150 in deposit money, visited the office of the City Attorney. Here he found that he could do nothing in court until he paid to have a summons served on Chip, and no summons could be served unless an individual's full name were known. Managing to get this information after a while, the ex-tenant paid for the serving of the summons, along with a filing fee for Small Claims Court. A while later a document was delivered to the ex-tenant from the landlord's lawyers - his brother and his father, who run the legal firm of H and H; and they refused to be sued in Small Claims Court, refiling the case instead to a more formal level of trial where lawyers could appear (they are not permitted in Small Claims).

The ex-tenant found that to continue his case against the landlord meant he had to pay further fees, and had either to pay for a lawyer of his own, which he was unable to do, or face the brother and father's legal expertise in the courtroom. The firm of H and H also counter-filed asking damages from the tenant for forcing their legal intervention, and these legal fees are unlimited by the law.

"Yes," the City Attorney told the ex-tenant, "Chip's brother and father COULD charge you, if they win, any amount within reason."

But if Kent and Fran were going to pay for the property, why shouldn't they own it? Clearly, the new landlord's luck in happening to have, through the arbitrary actions of the social system, a down-payment of several thousand dollars, bought him the right to have other persons pay off the balance on his house.

Renters like Kent and Fran, who are forced to give over to landlords a large chunk of their productive earnings, gain from it only temporary, day-to-day respite from having to live out in the open at the mercy of the wind and rain. The landlord gains the day-to-day wherewithal, but then appropriates, as bonus, right to the perpetuity, for himself and his children. Renters' children get nothing but the obligation to continue paying a debt that never ceases.

*

Karen got a mortgage on her house, and used the money as a down-payment on a second house (her old one was infested with cockroaches, and the plaster was falling). Once she determined what the payments on her new house would be, she placed a "FOR RENT" sign in front of her old house, offering the place at twice the cost of her mortgage. People without any other place to live, who were able to produce the required monthly sum, promptly moved in.

Karen now lives for free in a new, nice house. She is even thinking of buying a third one.

*

Chip is a professional landlord. He owns properties all over town, and he charges high rents with large deposits, all of which he asks for in cash. Aside from his illegible

owner purports to ascertain needfulness of repairs (which, however, he never will make). Of course actually these inspections are just dominance-submission rituals intended to unnerve the vulnerable dweller who practically exists on the mere license of this disgusting creature, and impress upon him for the umpteenth time that this property he lives on and in is not HIS, but belongs to the LANDLORD. Yes, the belching, imaginationless nobody professes to "own" the place where the tenant actually lives! Can anything more absurd than this be conceived of this?

As if "ownership" of anything except for USE had the slightest validity or defensibility! And since greed calls the shots, rental properties, homes, apartments, etc., are almost universally poorly-appointed, dreary and expensive. Plainly the degrading nature of this interaction infects the sensibility of the landlord and inflames or dulls the tenant. A poorer quality of men and children in the world is the result. How can there be responsible, mature, freedom-loving individuals when the world is divided up among those who, degradingly to themselves, live from the rent paid by others; and those who are forced to pay these rents and to tolerate the snooping, prying, laying down of arbitrary conditions, invasions of privacy and frustration which are inevitable hallmarks of this practice?

A recent newspaper feature entitled "Some Professional Hints for Amateur Landlords" delineated these attitudes in a crudely callous form. "Failing to make regular inspections... is a mistake," the article's author claimed. Indeed - a blithe disrespect for the fears, pains, discomfitures and bitter humiliations of a whole class of people marks this expressed attitude. Not surprisingly, the author of the article is in the employ of one of the worst kinds of landlords of all, a professional real-estate company. To these haughty

managers, "tenants" is a word denoting those from whom all human emotion and spirit have evaporated so that they are left only with the quality of being an unfeeling source of money for property "owners". The ideal landlord, in this view, is one who never lets us forget for a moment that we are weak, rootless nomads who have a place to live, not by right, but by his lordly whim.

Yes, failing to make "regular inspections" is a mistake, from the landlord's position. And why? Because otherwise there might grow to be a feeling among mere TENANTS that they had a home, a place to live and love in, a spot that was their own, where their humanity was respected. The "ideal" landlord is driven inexorably by the internal logic of the situation to be exactly what I have described - a LORD, and one who keeps his obtrusive presence constantly on hand to rub in the fact that that little humble room or apartment of yours is just a commodity which can be sold to somebody else any old time.

Psychologically this leads to a poor image of self among tenants, while landlords are automatically in a position of some power, which corrupts somewhat. Yes, an exceptional person here and there contrives to retain a modicum of decency even while acting as a landlord, but even still the master-slave relationship is present as at least an undercurrent, and its erosive ebb gnaws faintly but surely at the possible friendship and spontaneity that might otherwise exist unchecked between the two parties. There is nothing good that can be said about this practice whereby some own and others rent.

For concrete examples to illustrate the complete destructiveness and the injustice of landlordism, I turn to the cases of two acquaintances of mine, whom we can call Fred and Larry. Fred and Larry tenanted two separate apartments

No one has a right to extort rents any more than he or she has a right to blackmail a person. A few "social reformers", who have been in a quandary about rents and the like, have acted as if the so-called rights of landlords should still be respected even while doing away with the basic practice; and in this their irresolution is clearest. Landlords have no rights - they forfeit them by engaging in a criminal enterprise, for which seizure of dwellings by those who actually live in them, and complete discontinuance of paying of "rents", are the only remedies.

Portraits of the Way Things Shouldn't Be

Two "guest-houses" (tiny apartments) stood at the back of the property on which, at the front, there was a large house. Occupying the guest-houses were Fran and Kent, each of whom paid \$120 a month in rent to the owner, who lived in the front house.

One morning Kent discovered that the lot and the three dwellings were up for sale, when a real-estate agent came into the yard to show the property to a prospective client. As Kent hovered at the window to his tiny bedroom he heard the men stop outside.

"So your payments," he heard the real-estate agent say, "would come to exactly \$240 a month, and that's taken care of by your rents from these two studios."

"Frankly," the agent went on, "you could raise these rents a little and still be within market range. That'd provide a few extra bucks a month you could use for minor repairs to the house."

hands of non-dwellers who compel tribute from others, while feeling authorized at the same time to lay down conditions by which these subordinates are to live.

"Basically there are two type of people, leaders and followers," the National Landlord states. "You must decide which you intend to be. The difference in compensation and life style is vast. The follower cannot expect the riches to which a leader is entitled." This from some robber, some non-working "investor", some manipulator of inherited wealth! The fascistic philosophy of the landlord is fully exhibited in this statement as it arrogantly assumes that proper superiority of an occupation that draws the worst men and women to its ranks.

In other articles, the National Landlord discusses legal tactics to carry out against tenants; offhandedly remarks on the "numerous" evictions that are routine throughout the year, and gloats over a court ruling that allowed a landlord to use the excuse of a women's divorce and subsequent living with another man to evict her. (Evictions are a source of income second only to rent itself for a landlord, since eviction "for cause" is a prime opportunity for landlords to retain for themselves all the deposit money tendered by the tenants, as well as to collect more from the next ones.)

The slogan of the National Association of Landlords, as shown in the tabloid, is the commaless "We Shelter You America". The truth of the matter is, however, that landlords shelter non one, while in fact the LAW shelters THEM... from the immediate expropriation that would occur if there were not force of gun and jail to back up this phoney, abusive, so-called property-right.

in a property owned by one landlord, a Mrs. E. She had purchased this bloc of apartments, comprising some nine units in all, in 1947, at a total cost to her of \$35,000.

During the first few years of her ownership of the property. Mrs. E. was able to rent out the units at an average of \$50 per month apiece, \$450 per month. With rent incomes amounting, therefore, to at least \$5,400 a year, Mrs. E.'s initial expenditure, was repaid six and one-half years, in other words by 1954 at latest. Being generous we can grant another whole year of rent incomes as having been used to pay taxes and upkeep until then (although very few repairs were ever actually made). This means that during the years 1955-1975, tenants continued to pay Mrs. E. on a completely irrational basis, since she was doing nothing whatsoever to deserve payments from them. Her expenses and even efforts were long since amply repaid. Why, the, should she deserve anything else?

Now, when Fred took up occupancy in an apartment owned by Mrs. E., in 1969, he paid \$65 a month, plus tax and utilities. Between 1969 and 1975, therefore, Fred paid nearly \$4,500 in rent to Mrs. E. Considering that Fred lived in the apartment he rented for some six years, or 21% of the the total time that Mrs. E. had retained possession of the property, the limits of fairness would seem to dictate that, at most, he should have had to pay only about 21% of the total cost of HIS OWN single unit (and there was nine, bear in mind). Nevertheless, an examination of these figures shows that Fred actually paid MORE THAN 100% of the original cost to Mrs. E. of the unit he was living in, which, besides, had long before already to paid to Mrs. E. by the rents she had received during the late 1940's and early 1950's. In fact Fred really paid about 12% of the TOTAL COST of the entire bloc of apartments just during his six years of occupancy. Since,

during all these years, and assuredly also in those proceeding, effort put in by Mrs. E. into maintaining the property was minimal, it will be seen that an unjust payment was exacted for over 15 years from persons desirous of having a place to live. Owing to their economic misfortune (usually in not having inherited wealth), they were not able, as Mrs. E. was, to amass either the cash or the collateral all at once, so as to be able to live at all they were forced to rent from either Mrs. E. or from someone else very much like her.

Inasmuch as many thrifty, industrious, hard-working tenants came and went during the nearly three decades that Mrs. E. held the property, it must be asked whether any innate, intrinsic quality of Mrs. E.'s set her apart from everyone else in that area, and made her deserve that the others' efforts for certain periods each month should be expended in earning money with which to pay her, while she did not work at all. No such extraordinary qualities were possessed by this woman, and thus it must be concluded that the payments of rents to her over those years since her investment was recouped, was unjustifiable. It is therefore plain that an economic injustice was perpetrated against the many tenants during the time since 1955.

A further irrational fact becomes evident: The property itself, the land, that is, was a part of the surface of the planet, and was created by no one at all. At some point it was appropriated by an unknown person or persons who subsequently passed down "title" to the sector to others. Since this original person or persons obtained the land for nothing, any payment he or she may have been accorded beyond their own costs of improving the land, when it passed out of the original owner's possession, was likewise unjustified. Whenever the land is today bought or sold, absurdity is compounded.

intellectual curiosity and there's almost no boundary you can't reach." (The filler is one of a number in the paper, ranging from such profundities as "Your success depends on you," to "Remember this, fellow landlords; DO buy one house or more a year for the next five years.")

Nowhere in this publication is there the slightest hint of discussion about rightness or wrongness of making a controlled commodity out a necessary prerequisite to human life. Instead, landlordism is seen as the opportunity of the century; by juggling "mortgages", "credit" and "contracts", an individual who already has a place to live can seize yet another home that is on the "market", can provide a "down payment" out of money collected by the process of extorting rents from other individuals who need a roof over their heads, and from this base can look forward to being repaid FOREVER, though the payments by renters total hundreds or even thousands of times the initial "investment". Thus a "profit" that generates at an expense of persons who had not that first lump-sum - a profit that arises with no creative or productive work whatsoever.

Landlordism actually adds nothing to the world in the sense of bringing into being, through WORK, something that wasn't there before. It is merely a legalized swindle which prevents small periodic amounts of money taken in by a wage-earner from ever adding up to the potency of their mathematic equal, so that ten-thousand dollars possessed by the landlord at a single moment (usually because he inherited it in the first place), can produce lifelong obligations to him among the class of persons whose status allows ownership of perhaps one hundred dollars at one instant. Not surprisingly, the class of parasites on humanity reaps such succulent rewards from this practice that ownership of private dwellings falls, every year in an increasing portion, into the

Since publication of tendencies or of groups express the common denomination of behaviour, attitudes, and opinions shared by the constituency, it may be worthwhile for the renter and non-renter alike to glance at a periodical called "The National Landlord", issued by the National Association of Landlords in Washington, D.C.

The first thing that forcibly strikes the eye on gazing at this tabloid is the complete artistic degradation of the written word. This is, before anything else, possibly the most unattractive periodical one is likely to see. Heavy black lines, clip-art graphics, jumbled illustrations, frequent muddy borders of eagles and stars, blaring headlines an inch-and-a-half tall that say only such fragments as "RENTS" or "WILL" vie with gigantic exclamation marks and white-on-black reverses to create a hodgepodge that cannot be the product of a reflective and advanced intelligence. Screeching disorder and strident typographical cacophony combine with an ignorantly-written text to produce, on paper, a replica of the disagreeable mentality of the writers and editors as well as their intended audience - other landlords. The appearance of the issuance and its disconcerting ugliness are so abnormally striking that to mention the fact is almost obligatory, and is certainly not a variety of ad-hominem attack. Confusion in print is probably the result of actual confusion; likewise tastelessness and mental impoverishment. Large interior slogans in a periodical, where there is not even the rationale of a potential reader's seeing them from a distance on a news rack, simply indicate an irrepressible desire to shout... and to be obeyed.

Style of what's being said is just as flat, stupid-sounding, and graceless. We read: "It is real dumb to operate your business in a haphazard way." This is on page 13; ironically, on page 9 a filler reads: "Be smart - Develop

Moreover, the apartments on this land were constructed during 1919 and 1920, and whoever constructed them or arranged for their construction was no doubt amply repaid in about the same length of time as was Mrs. E. to be many years later. Thus, by 1930 at the latest, NOBODY, aside from the actual dwellers in the buildings, had any just claim to what was there. Therefore, Mrs. E. really had NO RIGHT to buy the property in 1947 because at that time NO ONE HAD THE RIGHT TO SELL. By 1930, to state this in the plainest terms, no person had any legitimate claim to deserve recompense, since the original builders, improvers, etc., had already been repaid and had had the use of the land besides. The property "belonged" to whomever used it. All the subsequent "owners" and landlords were, in fact, impostors.

Now consider the other tenant. Larry was hardly able to afford the apartment which he rented from Mrs. E., but to augment his income by decreasing his rent he trimmed trees and grass, repaired porches, and so forth, for which work he was "compensated" by a reduction in the sum that he had to pay in rent. Larry rented for over three years, or one-ninth of the total time Mrs. E. had owned the property, and during that time he paid about \$1800 to her in rents. This was 5% of what Mrs. E. herself had paid long ago and which she had no further right to be paid for, since her claims against the property, even such as they were, were already satisfied.

In early 1975 Mrs. E. decided to sell "her" property, and consulted neither Larry, Fred, nor any of the other tenants whose payments (which often, as in Larry's case, involved a real hardship at times) had made life so comfortable for her. Thus neither payment, nor work of upkeep on the property, nor occupancy, resulted in either of

these tenants being afforded the opportunity to say anything about the disposal of the dwellings they inhabited. Since no other rational basis for ownership exists than those mentioned, it is clear that the rights of the tenants to their homes were completely abrogated. Yet, all this abuse was carried on with the full sanction of law and prevailing social morality. Obviously these last have nothing to do with what is correct or just.

After the property was sold, both Larry and Fred were forced to leave when the new "owner", after walking through the buildings for the very first time, emphatically declared that the heating, wiring, and other systems contained in the apartments were "inadequate", a fact which it would seem is to be determined actually by the tenants who live therein, and not by an ignorant interloper seeing the properties for the first time. Such "repairs" naturally would mean that enormous rent rises would be in order, and again, naturally, tenants were given no choice about whether they wished these so-called improvements to be made, Mr. N., the new landlord, smiles and chuckles and lives in a fancy home outside of town. No doubt he likes to think his "improvements" result in a bettered living condition for the tenants; however, since his rent rise forced both Larry and Fred to move into inferior apartments, it can be seen immediately that injustice leads only to more injustice, and NOTHING, within this capitalistic system, results in an improved except at the severe cost to somebody.

Larry's new home is a slum-room in a depressing architectural hideosity, where there is not even running water, and where he must begin all over again the tiresome payments that never pay anything off, to another landlord. Fred moved away, leaving behind property in which he had invested \$45,000, but which he has no claim on at all.

Any projected improvement in society necessarily includes, in view of the facts outlined above, an end to landlordism and rents. Property, as a collective product of centuries of human labor, can only be "owned" by those individual who make direct use of it. Only in this way can a fundamental injustice, and a source of frustration, unhappiness, and exploitation, be eradicated.

The National Landlord

Crush the infamous thing! This snarl of revolt, long ago prompted by religion, is the slogan I wish everybody would hurl toward the foul, FOUL abuse, landlordism. As I've noted, landlordism putrefies the very atmosphere of life, by imposing a DEBT THAT CAN NEVER BE PAID. I've examined how this burden penalizes those who had the disadvantage to be born later than others; how it compels subservient attitudes in tenants and therefore caters to the interests of an UN-free society. My remarks, however, barely scratched the surface of the psychological cesspool of the landlords themselves.

The fact of a person's acting to bully, harass, and worry others is of consequence not only for its bearing on the victims, but for the depths of malignant callousness it pours into the psyche of such criminals. That tastelessness, ignorance, and oafish busybodism are common traits in landlords, will have been observed by anyone who has ever had the misfortune to have rent a dwelling-place. While some rare individual may escape complete depravity though acting as a landlord, the general rule holds frequently enough to illuminate the unmistakable conclusion.